

## Trails and Natural Areas Crew

The Trails and Natural Areas Crew (the Crew) was formed in the winter of 2005. It was tasked with managing the 7,500 acres, or approximately half, of Milwaukee County Park System property that has not been developed (e.g. Playgrounds, soccer fields, golf courses, etc.). The majority of this property is adjacent to waterbodies, or what SEWRPC has designated Primary and Secondary Environmental Corridors. It was also charged with addressing issues on the many trails, both paved and unpaved, found throughout the Park system, including the 106-mile Oak Leaf Trail. Natural areas management involves a diverse array of management techniques, the use of which are entirely dependent on site-specific conditions.

A major component of the work done by the Crew is invasive species removal and control. There are over a dozen plant species on County Parks property that are considered invasive. These plants grow so aggressively that they supplant the more desirable natives. Since County Park's property presents a target rich environment for the control of invasive species, the Crew has identified several project areas throughout the county where they are working to control or eradicate these species. The Crew relies on a number of methods to control invasive species. Volunteers, through the WeedOut! program, have proven extremely useful in controlling minor outbreaks. Herbicides are used to control more aggressive species and larger populations. This includes cut and treat, foliar and winter basal bark applications. The Crew relies heavily on herbicide applications to control problem species on most of its project sites. Additionally, prescribed fire, where applicable, is an excellent way to control invasives. The Crew is working on setting up prescribed fire regimes on several Park properties that would significantly benefit from such treatment.



*Removal of invasive honeysuckle shrubs as part of the oak savanna restoration efforts at Franklin Park.*

Accompanying most invasive species removals is erosion control. Many sites require some form of immediate slope stabilization after the invasives have been removed. The Crew uses various techniques, from cribbing to erosion control fabric and bio-engineering, to address erosion problems.

Finally, the Crew is working on propagating and planting native plants. The vast majority of project sites require the re-establishment of native plant species to perform the long-term task of erosion control. Direct seeding is an efficient means to establish plant cover and is being used on a couple of sites where feasible. Direct planting of plugs and potted plants is being used on several other of our projects where conditions do not favor direct seeding. This is more labor intensive, but establishment is more certain.

In general, for each project location the Crew is looking to establish a healthy native plant community, which will require minimal maintenance. The goal is to get to the point where the Crew can sweep through each site on a yearly basis to fend off any invaders that may have gotten a foothold. This goal is years down the road, but is certainly achievable with sustained support of the Trails and Natural Areas Crew.